1206

Richard H. Solomon

Current
Policy
No. 1206

Cambodia and Vietnam: Trapped in an Eddy of History?

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is an address by Richard H. Solomon, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, at the International Symposium on the Future of U.S.-Indochina Relations sponsored by the Los Angeles Times, *the Times Mirror Company, and the Asia Society, Los Angeles, California, September 8, 1989.*

It's a pleasure and honor to join here with friends and colleagues in this impressive display of interest in Indochina. It is a telling sign of the times that this gathering is taking place now and here in Los Angeles, one of the great cities of the Pacific rim.

Contemporary Asia's economic dynamism and political ferment highlight global transformations that are shaping the world we will know in the 21st century. Secretary of State Baker has succinctly characterized these trends as an increasingly integrated global economy based on an open market trading system sparked by spectacular technological change, the failure of communism as an economic and political system, and a worldwide trend toward democracy and free enterprise.

Would that the realization of these trends was without conflict and evenly accomplished. Yet, as we know, development is an arduous process characterized by conflict, uneven growth, and setbacks as a new era strains to break through the constraints of the old. Asia's explosive economic growth and political ferment have yielded dramatic successes, as in the Philippines and South Korea, where intense social pressures shattered authoritarian political orders and brought forth democratic reform. Yet in Burma, and more recently in China, we have seen how uncertain and painful the rites of passage to a new era can be.

What do these forces for change mean for Indochina? Does Vietnam's announced intention to end its occupation of Cambodia signal a major shift in policy? Or do old suspicions, old ambitions, and old ideologies still hold sway? The inconclusive results of the recent Paris conference on Cambodia leave us with an ambiguous picture of the future. Progress on the international aspects of a settlement contrasts with the inability, thus far, to construct a process of internal political reconciliation.

Tonight, I would like to share with you some thoughts on the prospects for peace in Indochina and about U.S. policy toward the region.

Asia After Vietnam

In 1967, Richard Nixon wrote his now-famous *Foreign Affairs* article "Asia After Vietnam," forecasting the gains to American interests that would come with an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam quagmire. The fruits of that policy perspective have given us two decades of dramatic benefits in Asia: normalization of relations with China; a general reduction in great power rivalries; and widespread economic growth and social advance—especially for the noncommunist states of the region. The developing countries of Southeast Asia—and their regional grouping ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations—have thrived in this post-Vietnam war environment. Thailand and Malaysia are now forecast to join Singapore as Asia's newest "newly industrializing economies." In the Philippines, the dramatic political revolution brought about by "people power" is now being matched by economic reform and increasingly sustainable growth. And Indonesia, the world's fifth most populous nation, enjoys political stability and increasingly successful economic reform.

ASEAN has become one of the pillars of U.S. policy in Asia. Collectively it is our seventh largest trading partner. Two of our security treaty allies in the region, the Philippines and Thailand, are ASEAN states. And since Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia in late 1978, we have cooperated closely with ASEAN in order to counter Vietnamese threats to the region, whether through military action or the major refugee flows that continue to burden East Asia.

It is in this context that we must view the contemporary situation in Indochina. Along with the Korean Peninsula, Indochina is one of two conflict zones that threaten stability and prosperity in East Asia. And while Vietnam's noncommunist neighbors have joined the global economy of computer chips and floppy disks, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Cambodia seem trapped in an eddy of history, as they play out the antipathies and ambitions of times past.

Conflict in Indochina

To much of the world, Cambodia has become "Vietnam's Vietnam." The ghoulish horrors of the Khmer Rouge reign were replaced in 1979 by the harsh realities of what is now a decade of Vietnamese occupation.

This third cycle of warfare in Vietnam and Cambodia has reflected a volatile mixture of three overlapping contemporary, yet historical, antagonisms.

Geopolitically, Indochina became engulfed by the Sino-Soviet rivalry during the 1970s. After the 1968 Tet offensive, Hanoi began to increase

S 1.71/4:

READEX FICHE best copy available

its dependence on the U.S.S.R. This trend accelerated when Vietnam fully aligned itself with the Soviet Union in 1978, in anticipation of its invasion of Cambodia—and expected counterpressures from China, thus adding a new dimension to the centuries-old Sino-Vietnamese antagonism.

Perhaps even more deep-seated than Sino-Vietnamese enmity is the historical conflict between the Khmer and Vietnamese. Such tensions were muted during the second Indochina war. Hanoi had nurtured a small Cambodian communist movement since the 1930s as an element of the Indochina Communist Party, and Vietnam reluctantly backed the Khmer Rouge during their guerrilla days.

Yet, Vietnam has long considered hegemony over Indochina a fundamental axiom of its own security. In 1950, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Hanoi's leading strategist, described Indochina as "a single strategic unit." At the 1976 Congress of the Vietnamese Workers' Party, building a "special relationship" with Laos and Cambodia was identified as a top foreign policy goal. Through intimidation and invasion, Vietnam persistently built such a relationship. As late as 1986, a party resolution elevated the special relationship between Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to "a law governing the survival and development of all three fraternal nations."

Vietnam's objective of hegemony over Indochina fueled ancient Khmer fears of national survival. Among the groups victimized during the Khmer Rouge holocaust were ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer communists suspected of loyalty to Hanoi. And like Cambodian rulers before them, the Khmer Rouge looked to China for protection against Vietnamese ambitions. Border skirmishes along the Cambodian-Vietnamese frontier in 1977 and 1978 grew into a full-scale Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia—to which China responded with its tutelary border war, thus fully interlocking the rivalries of Indochina with the Sino-Soviet conflict.

U.S. Objectives

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia confronted Thailand with the daunting prospect that Hanoi—at that time in possession of the world's fourth largest armed force and an age-old rival for influence in Southeast Asia—would control Thailand's eastern frontier. In response, ASEAN, the United States, and other Western nations embarked on a policy of condemning Hanoi internationally and supporting a noncommunist resistance to Hanoi's imposition of a surrogate regime in Phnom Penh.

Over the past decade, we have followed ASEAN's lead in pursuit of three interrelated objectives in Cambodia: restoring the country's national sovereignty through a verified Vietnamese withdrawal; preventing a return to power of the murderous Khmer Rouge; and facilitating self-determination for the long-suffering Cambodian people.

Equally consistent has been our policy toward Vietnam. While abhorring Hanoi's occupation of Cambodia, we have not closed the door to normalization of relations. We have made clear to Hanoi that its occupation of Cambodia is the principal obstacle to normalization—that establishment of diplomatic relations can occur only after a complete and verified Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in the context of an acceptable settlement.

Vietnam's troop withdrawal by the end of this month will be a welcome step. But it is not enough. After more than a decade of occupation, Hanoi has an obligation to do more than just walk away, leaving Cambodia in a state of civil war. Vietnam must participate constructively in efforts to bring about a settlement in Cambodia that combines an equitable and stable political reconciliation with national independence.

We have also developed an active dialogue with Hanoi on a range of humanitarian issues, in particular, on a matter which this Administration and the last have deemed of the highest priority: achieving the most complete accounting possible of our servicemen missing in Indochina. Hanoi understands that as a practical matter progress in these areas will affect the pace and scope of the development of our overall relationship.

This has been basic U.S. policy through four administrations, both Democratic and Republican. Central to realizing these goals has been U.S. and ASEAN support for the noncommunist resistance led by Prince Sihanouk. If there is to be a political process of national reconciliation, we believe that the noncommunist resistance holds the vital balance in achieving an independent Cambodia at peace with itself.

Let me also say a word about Laos, which often gets short-changed in discussions of Indochina. Laos is the one state of Indochina with which we have maintained diplomatic ties. In the past 18 months, Laos has embarked on a course of market-oriented economic reforms, greater political openness, and improved cooperation with its neighbor Thailand. These are welcome developments that appear to reflect a desire for greater interaction with the West.

Unfortunately, Laos is also a major source of narcotics; the involvement of some Lao officials in drug trafficking has led us to declare Laos ineligible for U.S. aid and to oppose some multilateral aid programs for that country. We continue to urge Laos to enhance cooperation with us in the war on drugs. I am pleased to say that this dialogue has recently produced some positive results, including a crop substitution program that we are now developing for a drug-producing area in northern Laos. We are also encouraged by Lao cooperation on the POW/MIA issue. Taken together, these developments augur well for the further development of U.S.-Lao relations.

While our policy has been constant, what has changed are the circumstances, both regionally and globally. Vietnam's self-created isolation—reinforcing self-defeating domestic policies of economic socialization and political repression—has heightened the deterioration of its economy and society. In terms of development, Vietnam is now well over a decade behind buoyant ASEAN neighbors such as Thailand.

The combined impact of this domestic deterioration, diplomatic and economic pressures from abroad, and the unrelieved burdens of its occupation of Cambodia has led Hanoi to embark on a major "renovation" program, with the focus on domestic needs. As a consequence, it decided to withdraw its forces from Cambodia and to rethink at least its short-term goals.

Another dramatic change affecting the diplomacy of Southeast Asia has been the emergence of an international environment of accommodation. Since the mid-1980s, we have seen new directions in Soviet foreign policy which have led to agreements on the withdrawal of foreign occupation forces from Afghanistan and Angola and diplomatic efforts to resolve these and other regional conflicts.

One aspect of Mr. Gorbachev's new diplomacy has been the effort to achieve a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, which in turn has fostered a new geopolitical calculus in Indochina. The Soviets have pressed Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. And China has begun a high-level dialogue with Vietnam, while expressing its willingness to cut off aid to the Khmer Rouge in the context of a complete and verified Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia and a comprehensive political settlement.

Cambodia: The Road to Peace

What does all this imply for Cambodia? The circuitous path that led to the conference in Paris last month has seen many of the same factors at play that are at work in other contemporary regional conflicts: the burdens of a decade of inconclusive warfare and heightened interest among the major powers in resolving the conflict—as re-

flected in U.S.-Soviet discussions on regional disputes, and Mr. Gorbachev's efforts to normalize relations with China.

But there is one factor that seemed to distinguish Cambodia from other such conflicts: the existence of a national leader around whom a process of political reconciliation might be built. Well before the pace of diplomacy stepped up—and again, following ASEAN's lead—the United States took steps to enhance the position of Prince Sihanouk and the noncommunist resistance. An initiative launched by Congressman [Stephen] Solarz in 1985 resulted in a $3 million humanitarian aid program to the noncommunists—a program carefully structured to prevent materiel from falling into the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

In more recent months, Congress has further expressed its support for the noncommunists in House and Senate resolutions proposed by Representative Solarz and Senator [Charles] Robb. The objective of such expressions of support has been to strengthen Prince Sihanouk's hand in anticipation of a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

The prospect of a political solution began to take shape in 1985, as Vietnam vaguely hinted it would withdraw its occupation forces from Cambodia by the end of 1990. Beginning in December 1987, Prince Sihanouk held the first of a series of meetings with Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Hanoi-backed regime in Phnom Penh.

While progress in these contacts was modest, positions were clarified and the broad requirements for a settlement became apparent. Then in August 1988, Indonesia hosted the first of what became known as the Jakarta Informal Meetings, or the JIM process. JIM moved the diplomatic process forward by bringing together, for the first time, the Cambodian factions, ASEAN, and Vietnam.

The pace of diplomacy quickened this past spring as Vietnam announced on April 5 that it was accelerating its timetable for withdrawal to September 30, 1989. Hanoi's initiative was an effort to structure a settlement so as to leave intact its surrogate regime in Phnom Penh led by Heng Samrin and Hun Sen. By forcing on the international community and on Prince Sihanouk a time-constrained choice between the Hun Sen regime, on the one hand, and the Pol Pot faction of the Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, Hanoi sought to load the diplomatic endgame in its favor.

This strategy was clearly evident during the Paris conference in Hanoi's—and Hun Sen's—unwillingness to compromise on a formula for power sharing as a basis for constructing a transitional coalition government under Prince Sihanouk.

A major aspect of the power-sharing issue at Paris was what to do about the Khmer Rouge. Should the Pol Pot wing of the divided Cambodian communist movement, responsible for the genocidal violence of the 1970s, be totally excluded from the political process with only a military option? Or should it—less its top leadership—be given a limited stake in a transitional political coalition that would, under international supervision, face the test of Khmer public opinion?

Secretary Baker has stated clearly that, from an American perspective, we want no role for the Khmer Rouge in a future Cambodian Government. However, the judgment of Prince Sihanouk, China, and the ASEAN countries—as expressed in the communique of their annual ministerial meeting this past July—has been that the chances for peace are better if the Khmer Rouge is included in a four-party interim coalition.

In other words, total exclusion of the Khmer Rouge is seen by those most directly involved as a sure formula for civil warfare, while their inclusion holds out some prospect that the struggle can be contained within a political process monitored by the international community.

The Paris Conference

It was the desire to prevent another round of civil warfare that led most participants in the Paris conference to insist on the need for a comprehensive settlement. International conciliation and internal reconciliation were thus integrally linked. Formation of a transitional coalition under Prince Sihanouk had to be combined with an international control mechanism to verify the Vietnamese withdrawal, monitor a cease-fire and the cessation of outside assistance to all the factions, and oversee the elections which would reestablish a legitimate political authority in Cambodia. And a UN role in organizing and overseeing all aspects of this complex effort was seen as essential to a credible peace process.

With these considerations in mind, France took the initiative in May of this year to convene yet another international conference in the lengthening series of efforts since Geneva in 1954 to bring peace to Indochina. France's historic ties to the region—yet its geographic distance—gave Paris a unique standing in efforts to catalyze a process that brought together the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the ASEAN six, five other concerned nations, the UN Secretary General, and the four Cambodian factions. Assembled together for 1 month in a conference room about one-third the size of this hall was an international mixture that at times generated high political drama.

Regrettably, the historical and persistent antagonisms, noted earlier, surfaced in daily, often bitter, exchanges. The hostilities, suspicions, and distrust—personal and political—among the Khmer factions and between the Khmer and Vietnamese, pervaded the conference sessions. The code words for these divisions—"genocide" and "settlers"—suffuse the conference documents: the issues of Pol Pot's genocidal violence and Khmer fears of Vietnam's hegemonial ambitions, as reflected in charges of large-scale, illegal Vietnamese settlement in Cambodia.

All the same, the conference did generate some encouraging progress on the external aspects of a settlement. The three formal working committees elaborated many of the enormously complex details of an international framework: the modalities of a cease-fire; the workings of an international control mechanism; the definition of international guarantees for Cambodia's independence and neutrality; plans for the repatriation of refugees; and the eventual reconstruction of the Cambodian economy.

Yet, the rock on which the Paris conference ultimately foundered was the deep distrust dividing the Cambodian factions. While Prince Sihanouk tabled, on August 4, a framework for power sharing that might have been the basis for negotiations, neither Hun Sen nor the Vietnamese displayed any real flexibility. If they found the Prince's proposal for a transitional coalition government unacceptable, they did not propose any realistic alternative. Their objective remained to leave the Hun Sen regime intact, while hoping to graft on to it the legitimacy of Prince Sihanouk's standing as a Khmer nationalist.

Beyond the Paris Conference

Where do we go from here? Our commitment is to a negotiating process and a political resolution of Cambodia's future. Yet it is clear, in the wake of Paris and as the Vietnamese prepare to withdraw, that Cambodia faces the prospect of continuing conflict. The four factions seem prepared to test their relative strengths in an internal political/military struggle before again engaging in an international negotiation. And Vietnam has expressed, as recently as August 24, its willingness to reintervene in the conflict if Hun Sen requests Hanoi's assistance.

What should U.S. policy be? Three propositions underlie the Administration's approach to this continuing tragedy:

First, Cambodia is a challenge to the conscience and concern of the entire international community. The Khmer people deserve their opportunity for national sovereignty, self-determination, political reconciliation, and development—and we want to ensure that there are no more Cambodian killing fields. The United States will play an active role in pursuit of these objectives, but it must be recognized that we have neither the political position nor the resources to do the job on our own.

Second, our primary security obligation in this region is to Thailand, to which we are legally bound by the Manila pact of 1954. As well, we have a major interest in the continuing integrity and vitality of ASEAN.

Third, we have a strategic objective in seeing Indochina freed of the rivalries of the great powers—an objective most likely realized if Cambodia and Vietnam are at peace within themselves and with their neighbors.

Given these propositions, the Administration will pursue three levels of activity in the months ahead, all designed to build on the diplomatic momentum of Paris.

• We will sustain active contacts with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. France, China, and the Soviet Union are the major powers with the most direct influence and interests in Cambodia and Vietnam. The Soviet Union, as the primary supporter of Vietnam and Hun Sen, must restrict its increasing flow of arms into Cambodia, and bring Hanoi to see that its own interests will not be served by another cycle of warfare in Indochina—which certainly will be the case if it seeks full power for Hun Sen in the absence of a process of political reconciliation. In return, Hanoi and Hun Sen—and the international community—have a right to expect China to equally restrict the supply of arms to the Khmer Rouge. Indeed, Beijing has an obligation to take active measures that will prevent the Khmer Rouge from again imposing a murderous rule on the Cambodian people. France, for its part, is due credit for taking the diplomatic risks associated with trying to help the Khmer factions bridge their differences. And we should remember that the Paris conference was only suspended, not adjourned—which is one way of saying that France and conference co-chairman Indonesia have continuing credibility as diplomatic deal makers.

• At a second level, the United States will continue to work closely with the ASEAN countries in support of their political approach to the Cambodian conflict. Their security interests are most directly affected by the search for peace in Indochina; we will support their efforts—most immediately at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly.

• Finally, we will sustain our support for the noncommunist resistance and Prince Sihanouk as the political center of a process of national reconciliation.

Some now argue that the threat of a Khmer Rouge resurgence is such that the United States must rely on Hun Sen rather than press for a comprehensive political settlement. This approach is seriously flawed on several counts.

First, a regime imposed and sustained by foreign force of arms lacks legitimacy. There is a fundamental principle here, which we would violate at the risk of the integrity of the international system and to our peril in many other parts of the world. Second, there is at present little basis for assuming that Hun Sen's unproven forces, absent their Vietnamese protectors, can eliminate the Khmer Rouge, a goal that eluded Hanoi's vaunted army for the past decade. And lastly, in the absence of a political settlement supported by Prince Sihanouk, such a move would pit the United States against Khmer nationalism—a policy hardly acceptable to the American people.

As democrats (with a small "d"), our commitment must be to a political process that permits national self-determination for the Cambodian people. We see press reports of Hun Sen's popularity—of reformist policies promoted by Phnom Penh that are restoring Buddhism, allowing private property and free market activity. If the Phnom Penh regime is as popular as its public relations campaign portrays it to be, it can only benefit by taking its case to the people in free and fair elections supervised by the United Nations.

The United States remains prepared to accept the results of such a credible test of Cambodian public opinion and to work with the international community in supporting a process of political reconciliation in Cambodia that contains safeguards against a Khmer Rouge return to dominance.

Thus, the issue comes back to whether the Cambodian factions, encouraged by their foreign supporters, can join together in a political process of national reconciliation. The United States will use its influence to move events in this direction. China and the Soviet Union must do the same. Moscow, in particular, must accept and act on the reality that without some willingness by Vietnam and Hun Sen to compromise on power sharing, there can be no negotiated settlement, no respite from armed conflict.

The immediate lesson of the Paris conference is that the divisions and distrust among the Khmer factions seem too great to be bridged by the compromises and constraints of coalition politics. Our continuing challenge is to provide the Cambodians an alternative to a test of strength on the battlefield. For without political reconciliation, Cambodia and Vietnam will remain outside the mainstream of development elsewhere in Southeast Asia, trapped in their own sad eddy of history. ■

PA/OAP, Rm. 5815A
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520–6810

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE $300

Address Correction Requested

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
U.S. Department of State
Permit No. G–130